STUDENT ACADEMIC MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT, STRATEGY TO IDENTIFY EARLY LEAVERS

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ABSTRACT

Vocational education today includes, as it always has, courses and programmes which teach important and valuable skills to a very high standard. Currently local colleges are still using the most traditional methods of assessing Learners for the right course which are basic diagnostic testing. This process tends to generalise learners and not pick up their learner needs and nor assess their learning type such as Auditory, Visual, Kinaesthetic and Reading.

This is key for retention, the primary way to determine and measure learner success rates at further education (FE) are through retention and achievement rates. Retention rates are determined after learners have completed an entire program. However, retention rates are measured while a studentprogresses through various stages and levels within a program. The most frequently measured and publicly reported levels are retention and achievement rates which can be gauged after an academic term, such as a semester, or an academic year.

KEYWORDS: student engagement, contextualise learning, motivation, aspiration.

Introduction

Student engagement has always received focus as a solution to declining academic motivation and achievement. To insure that our educational institutions are meeting these challenges, colleges and universities have been required in recent years, by a variety of government and educational institutions to identify whether they are providing students with the type of educational experiences students expect, as well as the opportunities to attain the occupational and personal benefits students desire.

There have been various motivational tactics used to ensure students to attend college, but research has identified a number of reasons that typically motivate students to devote the considerable personal and financial resources necessary to obtain a college qualification according to Williford(2008). As students progress further into their educational programs, they often identify additional motivators for continuing their education, including moral, emotional and cognitive development; quality family life; and personal preparation for competence in their future occupation as researched by Astin (1985).

As colleges prepare current students for future opportunities and compete for potential incoming students, they are being challenged to quantifiably identify whether students are engaging in educational practices that are preparing them for an increasingly diverse world of workMcGivney (2003).

Concepts intheory

From the very few frameworks or methodology which exists currently to specifically bring about an 'Improvement in retention within further education' sector in particular.

The level of competitiveness within colleges are influenced by the extent to which the organisation is flexible, a framework capable of identifying the degree to which colleges are considered to be confident (within the current environment in which it operates now) and which can pinpoint actions for improvement would, if applied, lead to an increase in competitiveness.

In summary, it appears that:
*   Decisions to complete programmes of study are less strongly influenced by demography and other factors external to the college than they are by students' attitudes to their experiences at college.

*   Completing and non-completing students are quite strongly differentiated by the experience of college, in respect of appropriate courses.

The true reasons for withdrawal, therefore, often appear to be complex, with a number of factors contributing to the decision not to continue. The scales appear to tip in favour of withdrawal when the occurrence of a personal, financial or employment-related problem coincides with a relative lack of confidence in the quality of support at classroom level, as found by McGivney (2003).

Where there is a high level of satisfaction and confidence in the quality of teaching and support, then the college appears to represent a powerful vehicle for helping learners confront external problems without withdrawal. We should note, though, that education is but one aspect of people's lives, and seen from an individual viewpoint a decision to withdraw from learning before completion of a course may be entirely rational, Straus (2004).

Retention and achievement are clearly linked, since students who withdraw before a course's normal completion date are unlikely to qualify. Students who drop out also share many of the same attitudes to their experiences as those who complete unsuccessfully.Analysis of the profiles of the student bodies at different colleges suggests that demographic variations account for no more than half of the inter-institutional differences in rates of student achievement, Astin(1993).

Gap in the Market

Firstly, it covers over a consistent inquiry into retention and achievement, providing continuity and development in this area. A collection of Paradigms supported theories leading to a series of Questions to determine type of learning style preferred from each student i.e.

*   Auditory
*   Visual
*   Kinaesthetic
*   Cognitive learning

In addition to this – a scoring mechanism to gauge whether students will be engaged within a particular course showing an interest within the subject. There are 3 central themes that will be followed:

1. Engagement
2. Tutor
3. Curriculum

Focus will be to identify the current situation in relationship to student retention and the critical factors that are driving students to withdraw from college.

Examinations of the depth which will allow colleges to understand strategies for improving student retention compare actual college environment examined with in the report and implement an improvement strategy for retention and achievement levels.

Student retention

Traditionally retention is gauged after completion of a course assessing a learner after they are withdrawn from the course and analysing their profile and grouping them to suggest what types of learners there are. Student retention is commonly linked to Tinto profounder based his theory in to analysing students entering post-secondary schooling with a variety of pre-entry characteristics that are associated with their family background (i.e. socio-economic status) and varying degrees of skills, abilities and high school preparation. Tinto groups them into four main areas – grade performance, intellectual development, peer-group interactions, and faculty interactions. Bean (1980) disagreed with Tinto theory and created their own theory on retention and developed a model of student retention as an alternative in explaining student persistence.

It has been argued by much research that retention is similar to turnover in work environments. They also emphasize the importance of students' behavioural intentions. Students' behaviour is shaped by their beliefs and attitudes which are in turn affected by their experiences within the institution. It is felt that Tintos has based his findings predominately on post-secondary schooling learners and on family background and socio-economic status.

There seems to be no concrete evidence to pinpoint that Tintos theory based on family background and socio economic is the real reason for contributing to attrition, indeed applying Tintos theory in to further education clearly argues and shows that this cannot be the case and to coin a phrase 'one size fits all' apparently does not apply here at further education, it is felt that it is a combination of student engagement the tutor's input and contextualising the curriculum.

It is argued that the theory would not be solely applicable as learner's attitudes and perceptions can change. It is felt that it can be a direct result to mind-set of an individual and what makes an individual change can be nurtured by the correct guidance and support. The author feels that clearly retention exists within all learning environments be it a school, college, training centre or university. It has been found that in further education retention is based on three common factors:

• Engagement, engage the learner in the subject.
• Contextualise curriculum.

In addition to the above to be able to identify the suitability and the characteristics of a learner for the right course additional research and further analysis will be carried out on completion of the project. Underdevelopment is a generic model (scoring system) that can be applied to learners to assess key attributes for a course, in particular this will focus on results found from and identifying the suitability of candidates for the right courses.

Reason why student leave
When asked directly, students are not likely to say that they dropped out because of lack of engagement as found by Grayson (2003).

In a summary of the literature, Grayson (2003) found that there are so many differences between institutions it is difficult to generalize findings across research studies. Nonetheless, students will often cite both financial and academic reasons for leaving an institution. Grayson also note that students who depart at different points in their program will provide different reasons for leaving.

A short stay survey, conducted by Grayson said that there were three main reasons for leaving:

1) Completion of the necessary credits they required or wanted

2) They changed their mind about their program or job goals

3) They transferred or qualified elsewhere.

Loss of interest in studies, lack of goals or motivation, disappointment in their own performance, program difficulty, changing their mind about their programs or goals, attaining a job, or deciding to work as reasons for leaving.

When these students were asked to provide the main reason for leaving, 23% indicated that they had completed the courses they wanted or needed, 16% specified that they had left for employment or work, and 11% said their decision was related to finances or affordability.

Although these students left without completing a credential, three-quarters described their experience as worthwhile and were satisfied with their overall experience with the program, Grayson (2003).

As learner's progress from enrolment to completion, a complex interaction of four major factors:

1. Personal
2. Social
3. Academic
4. Quality of their educational experiences

While these factors interact in ways unique to each student, studies across populations of students over time reveal there are patterns of behaviours associated with retention that can be distilled to serve as lessons about retention generally in post-secondary education McEllory(2008).

Conclusion
Students of all types are least satisfied when they feel that they are not being listened to, or when justifiable complaints are not treated seriously. Conversely, changes made in response to feedback are taken as a positive sign that students are valued, and invariably lead to an enhancement in overall satisfaction with the experience of college. Effectiveness of learner achievement and retention can be measured by a post achievement test.

This study has been guided by several theories the theories length and breadth of the student retention decisions mainly depend on the results of interactions between the students' academic and social background. This research theory suggests that students enter a college with a set of background characteristics these characteristics include family background, individual skills and attributes. Family background characteristics include family social status, parental formal educational level, and parental expectations.

Examples of individual attributes include academic aptitude, race, age and gender, student background - experiences include the characteristics of the student's schooling, academic achievement, characteristics which influence the students' initial goal. Goal commitment represents the course to which the student is motivated to achieve.

Tinto (1993)

Likert Scale
The Likert scale was used to determine the extent to which the areas of:
• Student confidence level
• Motivation
• Future aspirations
• Family background
• Student background

Respondent were asked to express agreement or disagreement on a four point scale.

Each degree of agreement is given a numerical value from 1 to four. Thus a total numerical value can be calculated from all the responses.

Before the analysis of the questionnaire assessment tool results was undertaken a scale for the answers according to the Likert scale was produced to locate all the responses within the boundaries to provide a means of comparison.

1 2 3 4
1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree.

Measuring Scale
Measuring scale produced to assess the questionnaire assessment tool ability to define the student engagement activity level.

There are five separate multilevel analyses were carried out on the following domains:
1. Very high confidence level - (no assistance required within class)

2. Moderate level of confidence - (some assistance needed within class)

3. Low confidence level - (will need some encouragement/support within the class)

4. Very low confidence level – (will need extensive support within the class)

Scoring System from the Likert scale
Measuring scale
Measuring scale produced to assess the questionnaires given to all learners as a motivational, confidence assessment tool ability to define the level of student motivation and confidence level. Classification of the Measuring Scale According Level assistance a learner may require.

It has been demonstrated that the questionnaire assessment tool is a useful tool for colleges in order to gain a greater understanding of the learner voice and in every case that successful implementation work has followed from the process. It has further been demonstrated that the process was practical and all learners felt satisfied participating in the study. From a quantitative point of view the methodology was willingly embraced by all the programme leaders and the interest which the senior management team demonstrated in undertaking the work was highPascarella(2005).

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